

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 001154

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S, DRL, AND INL/AEE-AHENRY-PLOTTIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM MZ RENAMO FRELIMO](#)

SUBJECT: CLASHES BETWEEN FRELIMO AND RENAMO HEAT UP IN
SOFALA PROVINCE

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

Summary

1. (U) Reports of friction between the ruling FRELIMO party and the main opposition party, RENAMO, have increased over the past weeks, ahead of Mozambique's December 1- 2 general elections. On August 12, violence broke out between RENAMO armed guards and police in the town of Inhaminga in the central province of Sofala. One police officer was killed. Although the current situation in Inhaminga is described as calm, scuffles between the two groups continue in the hotly contested province, according to local press reports. End Summary.

Background

2. (SBU) The 1992 Rome Peace Agreement (RPA) called for the demobilization RENAMO troops. It also contained a clause allowing an armed RENAMO security unit "responsible for the personal security of its highest ranking leaders...for the period between the ceasefire and the elections." Despite this proviso, the party has retained a force of some 150 men in strongholds in the Sofala province, on the grounds that the unit protects RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama's home in the region. Under the RPA, this group was to be integrated into the Mozambican state police force following the 1994 elections. However, in 1998, Dhlakama declared that he did not want his bodyguards integrated into the police, allegedly denying the RPA contained such a clause. While it appears true that Dhlakama prefers to maintain his guard unit separate from the police force, it is equally true that there has been little or no visible effort on the part of the Government (GRM) to resolve the issue. End Background.

FRELIMO and RENAMO Clash as General Elections Approach

3. (U) Reports of skirmishes between members of the ruling FRELIMO party and the main opposition, RENAMO, have increased over the past weeks, causing some skeptics to question the stability of the peace Mozambique has enjoyed over the past 12 years. On August 12, reports surfaced in the local press of gunfire between armed RENAMO "presidential guards" and the police's Rapid Intervention Force (RIF) in the town of Inhaminga in the central province of Sofala, causing worried citizens to flee into the bush for safety. According to most reports, the clash broke out after RENAMO guards entered the police station in Inhaminga, demanding the release of two RENAMO men detained on accusations of assault on a local FRELIMO official. The police did not open fire and allowed the detainees to be removed. RIF forces from Beira were called in later to assist the local police in recapturing the prisoners, at which time gunfire was exchanged. At least one local policeman was killed by RENAMO guards during the incident. Local authorities say the situation in Inhaminga is currently calm with shops, schools, and public institutions open again. Post has learned from regional and local police officials in Beira that police will be deployed throughout the district from now until the post electoral period. Despite such assurances, scuffles between the two groups continue to be reported in the press.

4. (U) On August 17, local police said a group of 15 RENAMO guards armed with AK-47s attacked a vehicle in Cheringoma, also in Sofala province. No casualties were reported, but the group made off with over USD 4,000 in cash and belongings. Unofficial sources in the press claimed the armed men in question were the same "presidential guards" driven out of Inhaminga a week earlier. The RENAMO political delegate in Sofala denied the police version of the attack. Reports of further shooting in Cheringoma surfaced again on August 24, however, the Sofala provincial police command neither confirmed or denied the incident in the press.

Comment

5. (SBU) Friction between the two groups has lingered in RENAMO strongholds in Sofala province since the signing of the RPA. Some local and personal conflicts in this highly contested region take on political overtones when those involved belong to opposing parties. Although little press attention is usually given to these incidents, such reports receive heightened attention during pre-election periods.

Some private newspapers have published editorials playing down the events, reminding readers that such stories are commonplace during elections and are being used to the political advantage of the two increasingly uneasy parties. There is also little concern that such incidents will erupt into full blown fighting.

16. (SBU) Nevertheless, these incidents highlight the distrust between the two main parties, and the need for continuing efforts to establish a culture of political tolerance. The clashes in Sofala imply that the country's Electoral Code of Conduct is not working. The Code, drafted earlier this year by smaller parties in the RENAMO-UE coalition and signed by both RENAMO and FRELIMO, commits signatories to observe principles of non-violence up to and during the election period. Although it is uncertain how these recent skirmishes will affect the elections, it seems clear that such acts are likely to continue and to remain front page news in the run up to the general elections. End Comment.
DUDLEY